



Calgary's own honky-tonk legend lives on

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Sometime between the close of the nineteenth century, when America's mid-western establishments of ill-repute offered alcohol, piano playing and cheap women—initially known as Honky Tonks—and the time of the Dirty Thirties immortalized in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, there emerged the unmistakable and unforgettable American sound known as honky-tonk music.

Originally tagged as hillbilly music, and later spawning boogie woogie, jump blues and the big daddy of them all, rock 'n' roll, honky-tonk was the country music of rural people forced to live in urban centres, who crooned of the timeless heartaches brought on by loneliness,

alcoholism, adultery and lost love.

Several decades later, and many rungs up the socioeconomic ladder, the honky-tonk tradition is carried on by Tom Phillips, son of a Calgary lawyer and a homemaker, and his band, The Men of Constant Sorrow.

It's hard to sit still hearing these seven middle-aged boys—Gary Gelhorn on drums, Tim Leacock on bass, Dwight Thompson on electric guitar, Charlie Veilleux adding the "crying voice" sound with his pedal steel guitar, David Hoffart on mandolin, Ron Casat on accordion and Phillips on acoustic guitar and lead vocals—and nobody does. Couples crowd the dance floor, jiving, at the Ironwood Stage and Grill in Inglewood, just a few minutes from downtown Calgary.

If you love honky-tonk music, you'll love Tom Phillips and the Men of Constant Sorrow. Even if you hate honky-tonk music, I reckon you'll still love Tom Phillips and the Men of Constant Sorrow.

This may be 21st century honky-tonk, but it's soulfully peppered with traditional nods to Hank Williams classics like "Your Cheatin' Heart" and "Honky Tonk Blues" for that good ol' country flavour.

Look for the band this summer at Dauphin's Countryfest in Dauphin, Man., from July 1 to 4, sharing the stage with country greats Dwight Yoakam and Ricky Skaggs. You'll also catch them playing all around their hometown during the Calgary Stampede, from July 9 to 18. In November, the band will release a new CD, *Tom Phillips and the Men of Constant Sorrow Live at the Ironwood*, under the Calgary-based Ruby Moon Records label, the long-awaited followup to 2002's *The Essential* and the group's 1999 self-titled debut album. That should put to rest the concerns of some fans who worried the band might be finished after Phillips released his first solo work, *High Flyer*, earlier this year with the help of his old buddies Kit Johnson and Oscar Lopez. "This band is like going fishing with your friends every time we get to play," says Phillips of getting back with the Men of Constant Sorrow.

Phillips wrote the single "Alberta Song" for the new CD in response to what he calls "the old idea that in Alberta, people are rednecks." He explains the song is about "how Albertans are educated and still like to have a good time, and that, really, we're not necessarily what the rest of Canada thinks we are."

Phillips, a 46-year-old father of three daughters, studied the French horn and guitar before studying education at the University of Alberta. He is a voracious reader whose passion for Richard Ford, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck and John O'Hara led him to open Calgary's Bankview Books, which he runs in his spare time. A love for great literature is a big part of his life, he says, but adds that his honky-tonk career will "take me to my grave, for sure." ■